

His first attempts are half commonplace-book, half commentary on it. The *Letters* of Seneca and the *Morals* of Plutarch provided his models. In part he was indulging his eternal curiosity; but he was also in search of thoughts to guide and sustain him on the downward slope to old age and death. But as time passes, he becomes less interested in growing a shell of Senecan stoicism, more in himself and in expressing himself. In 1580 his first two Books appeared. It was time for a change of activity. In 1578 he had been attacked by the stone, of which his father died ten years before: 'la plus soudaine de toutes les maladies, la plus douloureuse, la plus mortelle, la plus irremediable'. An excellent reason for travelling, to see if spas are any less futile than doctors. And so there follows that seventeen-month excursion through South Germany, Tyrol, and Italy recorded in his *Journal* by this invalid who leaves his robust travelling-companions half prostrate, rushing off the route in every direction to see some new thing; hating, in his eagerness to get on, the very sight of the place where he had passed the night; and ready to go riding off all the way to Greece by land, instead of Rome-wards, if they would but let him. He examines with equal curiosity Swiss stoves and Swiss pastors; appreciates the mountain-scenery of the Brenner; visits the mad Tasso at Ferrara; dines with the Grand Duke

(the Francesco de' Medici of Webster's *White Devil*) and
the notorious Bianca Capello at Florence;
sees at Rome
horse-races and processions of flagellants, the
circumcision
of a Jewish infant and the casting out of a
Christian devil;
kisses the Pope's toe and argues about his
Essais with the
Papal censors; gives a ball with prizes for
pretty peasant-
girls at the Baths of Lucca; then learns that
he has been
elected Mayor of Bordeaux, with a special
letter from the
King forbidding him to refuse; and so home
by the Mont